



Cyr: Good news about democracy, market economics and more

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"Nattering nabobs of negativism" is probably the most enduring of the many alliterative declarations of Spiro Agnew, vice president in the Nixon administration until he was forced to resign because of corruption. This particular phrase, penned by Nixon speechwriter William Safire, was designed to put down media people who emphasize bad news over good.

Why, Agnew asked rhetorically, did the malicious media not put priority on the positive? He denounced "pusillanimous pussyfooters" too craven to openly embrace optimism and thus provided another enduring line of political pugilism.

Inspired by the spirit of Spiro "Good News" Agnew, below is a list of positive developments that in fact deserve prominent attention and sustained reflection.

First, democracy is becoming the accepted way of life for the world's population. As recently as a quarter century ago, the people of Latin America lived almost uniformly in various degrees of authoritarian regime. Today, Castro's Cuba is literally the only remaining dictatorship in the Americas. Even autocratic Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has to face the voters, and has lost on occasion. Once tiny Costa Rica was a beacon of freedom south of our border. Now, the light has spread throughout the Americas.

Likewise, reasonably honest and genuinely contested elections are spreading in Africa, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union and -- on the local level -- in China. The dramatic Arab Spring therefore can be regarded accurately as the latest manifestation of a drive toward representative government, which literally is worldwide in scope.

Second, market economics is spreading as alternative ways of producing wealth and prosperity are discredited. Deng Xiaoping's declaration of "People's Socialism" for China in 1992 has become a benchmark event for not only that nation but for the world.

The new Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between mainland China and Taiwan is the latest, and perhaps most profound, of the economic revolution's consequences. Virtually all barriers to exchange between the mainland and the island have come down. Taiwan's role as a source of commercial and technological expertise, as well as investment capital, will be vastly expanded in consequence. This provides some reassurance in the leadership transition in North Korea.

Third, improved nutrition and health care has transformed the length as well as quality of life for hundreds of millions of people. At the start of the 20th century, the average human life span in industrial nations was about 40 years. By the end of that century, that span had doubled.

Fourth, these remarkable improvements proceed from a base of extraordinary growth in economic production. Yale historian Paul Kennedy, in "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers," notes that total industrial manufacturing rose from an assigned base level of 100 in 1900 to 3041.6 by 1980. For extensive specific data on the improved human condition, from teeth to transport, consult the Libertarian Cato Institute volume, "It's Getting Better All The Time," by Stephen Moore and Julian Simon.

Fifth, scientists at the mammoth laboratory CERN, located in a suburb of Geneva, Switzerland, report that they apparently have been able to record a neutrino beam travelling slightly faster than the speed of light. According to Albert Einstein's universally accepted laws of modern physics, this is impossible.

The CERN scientists are seeking peer review to confirm or reject their data. If confirmed, vast new opportunities for technological development likely will unfold, quickly.

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